The Life of Velma Viola Fruhling
Written by Ardis Marshall

Mother was born in Lincoln, Nebraska on Dec. 18, 1911. She was the daughter of Harrill & Ethel Johnson, and was named Velma Viola Johnson. They lived a short while in Hemmingford, Nebraska, the family moved to Florida, then back to Nebraska. When she was 8 her brother, Harrill Dean Johnson, Jr. was born. Also the family moved to Vacaville, California. The family went to Vacaville by train, and was met by Velma's Grandpa Frank and Grandma Martha King, who were Ethel's mother and father. They had moved there earlier.

Grandpa Johnson bought a lot and built his own home. Grandpa was a carpenter, and built other homes in Vacaville, also. Mom liked to watch him work. Last year we remodeled our house, and I was surprised to hear what she knew about construction!

Mom attended the Vacaville grammar and high schools, and then went to San Jose State College where she majored in Music and General Elementary, and minored in Art, finishing all degrees in 4 years. She then taught a 5th grade class at the Vacaville Grammar School for one year.

Arthur Fruhling had been the minister at the Community Church in Vacaville when Mom grew up. The summer following her first year of teaching, Arthur and Velma were married on July 4, 1936. Yes, there were a lot of years difference in their ages -- 30 to be exact. But they loved each other, and that was evident throughout their lives. Mom was a real help to Dad -- she was organist, choir director, Sunday School teacher.

Three children were born from their marriage -- Ardis, Arthur and George. Mom made many of our clothes when we were young -- dresses for me, and even suits for the boys. She taught piano lessons to make enough money to make sure we had enough food and clothes, as my dad wasn't paid very much. She taught all three of us piano lessons, and her extra income paid for lessons on other instruments from other teachers. Mom was also the church choir director, and she directed both adult and children's choirs. All three children began singing in the children's choirs at a young age -- around 6 years of age.

Some of the most fond memories I have of our family is the vacations we took. One month of each year we spent at our family's mountain home in the Santa Cruz mountains, or at Tuolomne Meadows in Yosemite camping. Both of our parents loved the hiking and camping, and we had great times as a family during those vacations. My brothers and I went on the hikes led by the rangers, and Mom went along with us most of the time. Mom fixed regular meals when we camped at the meadows, too -- none of this canned stuff! She even had her pressure cookers and a stove-top oven. My Dad used to say she took the whole house when we went camping!

Mom did all she could to encourage us in our schooling, our music, and in every area of our lives. She and Dad paid for us to attend Pacific Music Camp at Stockton, CA, when they really couldn't afford it. When I began playing the pipe organ for church, they took

me to Stockton every other week for lessons at the College of the Pacific. Arthur played baseball -- and was a very good pitcher! We attended a lot of baseball games together as a family -- and Mom was in there rooting for him! Mother helped George become a ham radio operator when he was only 13, and actually got her own license!

In everything we did, Mom stressed that we should do the best we could, and that we could accomplish almost anything if we had a positive attitude. One book we had as a child was about two trains. One had a large locomotive, but couldn't get up the steep hill because he thought he couldn't, the other a small locomotive that made it to the top because "he thought he could". Yes, Mom bought us that book, and I have never forgot the lesson it taught.

When my brothers and I were all in school, Mom began teaching again. From 1955-65 she taught 4th grade at Elm School in Vacaville. She also taught the 4th, 5th & 6th grade choir. Beginning in the fall of 1965 she taught at Willis Jepson Jr. High School in Vacaville, teaching mostly music classes. In addition to 2 or 3 choirs, she taught music appreciation, guitar, art, and occasionally one or two other subjects.

Mom's choirs did extra special things. They took trips in which concerts were combined with fun things - such as a trip to Disneyland with over 50 students! She did many other things to make it fun to be in her choirs. However, she was a strict teacher, and demanded excellence in all her classes from the students, or from church choir members. Her school choirs won first place in State competitions every year she took them. Besides singing for the normal concerts, her choirs sang for many community functions. She had a special place in her heart for people in hospitals and nursing homes, and her choirs and vocal groups often performed for them. Both the school and church choirs sang very advanced music, including Handle's "Messiah". Many times she arranged the music herself if she couldn't find just what she wanted.

Mom tried to choose music that was educational, uplifting, and most of all incorporated Christian music into what she did -- yes, even in the public school. One program she put on in the public school was on Biblical prophecy! No one ever complained to our knowledge. I think the reason there was no complaints was the excellence of the performances.

In 1973 Mom was chosen as "Teacher of the Year" in Vacaville. When she was told that she was being considered for this honor, she was asked to fill out a questionnaire in which she gave a Biological Sketch & Philosophy of Teaching. Our family thought this so described her life of teaching that we have printed out this for each one of you to keep. The following are some of the things she wrote:

> "I believe that as teachers, we should present to the students the best that each of us is capable of presenting."
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> "I think an instructor should strive to demonstrate, know her or his subject so well, and teach in such an interesting way that young people not only learn the fundamentals in class, but are challenged to get in and dig to improve themselves outside of school."

"We as teachers must realize that each student is a living human being, and has feelings just as we do. We should strive to know each student, to call him by name as soon as possible at the start of each new class, to show him that we do care and share his concern about himself, what he is learning, and what he will make of himself."

"A teacher must have interest and enthusiasm for her subject in order to mirror the same in her pupils."

HER CONCLUSION: Teaching is not the easiest job. It will require the best a teacher has to offer. Other positions might have higher pay, but could there be any more varied and challenging than the one dealing with the most precious thing in the universe, our youth, and who in turn will influence others? With deep emotion, a teacher receives the greatest of rewards when a former student walks up and says. 'Because of you, I am going to be a teacher, too.' A good teacher, then becomes as eternity. One never knows where her or his influence ends. And the music teacher should never forget, that in doing her best job, she is leading through class music and concerts in school, and community the most inspirational, profitable, and never to be forgotten experience of understanding and love, mixed with the greatest of languages -- that of 'Music'."

This influence she talked about shows in our own family. Mom taught her brother, Harrill, piano lessons when she was in high school. He later became a music teacher, and strove for excellence in his work. Uncle Harrill's daughter, Linda, is now a teacher in Fairfield, CA, and was given the "Teacher of the Year" award there this year. Her sister, Karen is also a teacher that demands excellence and is concerned for her students. My brother, Arthur, a Community College teacher in Yuba City, CA, and just received one of the four "Excellence in Teaching" awards given by the State of California Math Council for Community Colleges. My brother, George, excels in the computer electronics field.

Mom's whole life was based on these teaching principles. She was a great encourager to not only her students, but to everyone she met. She went to great lengths to keep in touch with as many students and friends as she could, always encouraging them.

Mom retired from teaching in Dec., 1981 -- at the age of 70. She taught 5 years longer than was usually allowed, and was asked to stay longer than that, but didn't do so. She didn't really retire from her music, however. She still sang in church choirs, arranged music -- especially piano music, and encouraged others to learn music.

For the last 10 years of her life, Grandma Johnson was in a nursing home. Mom took her home for at least one meal a day as much of the time as she could, made sure she had nice clothes, did her laundry, and made sure she was taken care of properly.

Mom lived life to the fullest, and would always learn anything new. She had many hobbies, among which were photography, rock hounding, and beading. Mom did everything with a zest -- including her exercises. She went to water therapy in California, and until 1991 she would swim 60 laps in the pool!

Mom loved her family dearly. Besides her children, she is survived by 13 grandchildren and 19 great-grand children. She enjoyed being with her family and made family gatherings quite lively! Mom loved to do artwork with the children, to teach them songs, and to do fun things with them. She encouraged us all in any way she could. She could always find something to praise about someone.

Mom loved the Lord dearly. One of the last piano arrangements she did was "O that will be Glory for Me". She was looking forward to being with the Lord in Heaven. She went home to be with her Lord on April 2, 1997, at the age of 85. She will be looking forward to seeing her loved ones there, both the ones that have gone before her, and the ones who will someday follow.